



## **Crossfire** by **OverTheMoon322**

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**Summary:** After the mansion incident, the party tries to make the most of the rest of their summer vacation as Will and Robert's newfound relationship continues to develop. When a sleepover at Mike's house goes south, the party's integrity is compromised, threatening to leave the party broken before high school begins. Sequel to "Stronger Together."

# Crossfire

## Chapter One: A Split Campaign

"You're running. You keep running far away from the house and the demogorgon. The night is quiet. Then up you see something...a place that looks strangely familiar..."

The night of July 23rd, 1985, the party was gathered around the table in Mike's basement. All seven of us were there listening intently to Mike's narration. We were in the midst of the new Dungeons and Dragons campaign Mike had been planning for the last two weeks. I had contributed some ideas for the story, and now I was getting to see them implemented. I couldn't help but feel a little proud.

Dustin wiped his nose, while Lucas leaned forward, both concentrating on Mike's words. Will was twirling his hair with his right index finger. He had just gotten a brand new haircut a couple of weeks ago right before our first date. Gone was his bowl cut. Now his hair was a bit shorter on the sides and back and longer on top, making his ears visible. His hair was parted on his right side, and his bangs brushed toward his left side. Everyone freaked when they saw his haircut the day after our date at the movie theater, but they all liked it and commended him for going for it. Of course by now, everyone was getting used to it. It still drove me nuts how much more attractive it made him though. I started thinking maybe I needed a haircut too. I ran my hand through my dark brown hair. It was getting a little long. It was a little longer than Will's now but definitely not as long as his hair used to be.

Max had her elbow on the table with her head resting on her hand, while El watched Mike intently, her fascination like a child listening to an epic bedtime story. She loved when Mike got into his dramatic narrator mode. It was a side of him she hadn't ever seen until he started inviting her to our D & D sessions. El had only played like once or twice before. At first she would just observe, and Mike would go slower than normal, trying to explain what was happening to her. Being a fast learner, El picked up on the game quick enough.

Although it was my turn, Will and I were playing footsies under the

table, struggling to contain our giggles so as not to infuriate Mike, who of course took the game master role very seriously. Distractions that took away from the serious nature of the campaign were forbidden.

"...As you get closer, you realize you've stumbled into a schoolyard."

"Really? A schoolyard?" Dustin stared at Mike incredulously.

Ignoring him, Mike continued. "You explore the schoolyard, stepping through the neatly trimmed grass field. Wait...what's that ahead?" Mike paused for dramatic effect.

"Oh god, it's the shadow man, isn't it?" Dustin groaned.

"I thought El and I already dealt with him in our side quest," Max said.

"It's a figure cloaked in shadow!" Mike announced, banging on the table.

"Damn it! I knew it!" Dustin exclaimed.

"Robert, what's your action?"

I had barely been listening, as I was too distracted by Will's socked foot rubbing up against mine. "Sorry what?" I looked up at Mike.

Lucas rolled his eyes, obviously aware of the source of my distraction.

"There's a figure cloaked in shadow in front of you. Do you approach it or not?" Mike asked again with an annoyed tone.

"Yes, I approach it," I answered.

"You approach the figure, unsure whether it's a foe or something else. As you get closer, you recognize the figure's face. It's Will!" Mike revealed. Will perked up after hearing his name, his attention now fully on Mike. "You try to communicate, but he's not responding."

"What happened to me?" Will asked, looking confused.

"You're under a catatonic spell," Mike replied.

"I don't understand. I left the house with Lucas and Dustin, and now I'm suddenly under a spell?"

"That was your hidden consequence for leaving to get supplies."

Will didn't reply, but he had a puzzled look on his face as he waited for Mike to continue.

"Robert. What's your action? Do you try to save Will now or move on and warn the others first?"

"I don't know!" I yelled. Even though this part of the campaign stemmed from my ideas, I didn't know what the consequences were for either action, nor did I even know there would be an option to save Will.

"Warn the others!" Lucas shouted.

"I agree with that!" Dustin also shouted. "Less risky."

"Save me!" Will cried out.

"Save him first. His cleric abilities might help Dustin and Lucas if they're in trouble too," Max suggested. El just watched as her friends argued, not taking a side.

"Don't be dumb. You're a rogue. You can sneak around and get more information without getting caught. What if this is a trap?" Lucas argued.

"Move on!" Dustin reiterated.

"Save me, I believe in you," Will pleaded, his beautiful hazel eyes widened in desperation.

Finding myself unable to say no to those eyes, I made my mind up. "Save Will."

Dustin and Lucas groaned upon hearing my decision. "C'mon man," Dustin said.

"You have to roll a 14 or higher to save Will," Mike instructed me.

I picked up the two ten-sided dice from the table. I stared at my hands as I shook the dice around my sweaty palms. I threw them onto the table. One die read "5" while the other read "7." 12. I had failed to save Will. Feeling dejected, I looked up at Will to apologize.

"Thanks for trying," Will put his hand on my thigh under the table. I put my hand on top of his, rubbing small circles with my thumb on the back of his hand.

"Great, now what?" Lucas questioned Mike.

Mike frowned. "In the time you spent trying to save Will, Dustin and Lucas have also been put under catatonic spells."

"Are you kidding me?!" Lucas exclaimed with anger.

"The shadow man got all three of you."

"Damn it!" Dustin yelled.

"This is bullshit! We didn't even get to try to fight him off," Lucas complained.

"At least you're not trapped in a house with the demogorgon," Mike snided back.

Lucas stared up at the ceiling and sighed. There was no point in arguing with the game master.

Mike turned back to me. "Having failed to save your fellow party members, you decide to do some reconnaissance on the shadow man laying low for now. Your turn is over."

I frowned at my failure to save my friends. Even though it was just a game, I couldn't help but feel guilty about the chain of events my actions had caused, especially since the campaign's storyline hit very close to home. It was based off of a combination of the visions we had experienced in the ginormous abandoned mansion in the woods a couple of weeks ago. Max and El had successfully navigated through a version of the vision Max experienced while the rest of us

were placed on a quest based on Mike's vision. From what Mike had told me, they were set to intersect at some point as the mystery of the shadow man unfurled itself. I wondered if Mike had somehow incorporated my vision into the plot as well since he had me describe it in detail. One thing was for sure, the campaign was far from over. If I knew Mike, there's no way he would design a campaign that doomed us to failure.

"El, it's your turn again," Mike grinned at his girlfriend. El smiled back at him and nodded. "You sense something..." Mike began to narrate dramatically. "Something terrible. Your friends are in danger. The paladin is stuck in a standoff with the demogorgon, unable to escape the house he hides in or else he faces certain peril. The cleric, bard, and ranger have fallen under catatonic spells while the rogue searches for information on how to save them. Who do you meet up with first? The paladin or the rogue?"

"The paladin. I have to save the paladin first," El answered confidently, eyes locked on her boyfriend.

"Using the fast travel abilities of the zoomer, you and the zoomer arrive at the house in no time at all. Your stamina is at full strength while the zoomer's is temporarily drained from the distance travelled. Do you wait for the zoomer to recharge her stamina or do you go straight in and attempt to rescue the paladin?"

"I, uh..." El started to answer.

The door to the basement burst open. Karen Wheeler appeared in the doorway at the top of the steps.

"Mike! Time to wrap it up for the night. Girls, the chief's out in the front waiting for you," Karen called down to us, pointing at her wrist.

"C'mon Mom! We're about to reach the most exciting part! Just another half an hour, please?" Mike begged his mother.

"Nuh-uh. It's a quarter to midnight! You're lucky I let you all stay up this late," Mrs. Wheeler replied. "Besides, you know Jane has a curfew."

Mike sighed. He knew Hopper never let El stay out after midnight. One of his ground rules. Tonight Max was sleeping over at the Hoppers' cabin. Max loved those nights she could get away from her own house. Hopper was aware of Max's abusive father, and while Max begged him not to look too deeply into her situation, he was happy to provide her a respite. He promised he would only look into it off the record if something major came up.

"Alright we'll pick this up tomorrow?" Mike said in a half statement half question kind of way, his eyes darting around the room for confirmation from us.

"Sounds good to me," I replied. Everyone else nodded with um-hums.

"Bye Mike," El breathed, kissing him on the cheek in front of everyone, which made Mike blush.

"Bye, El," Mike said back, staring at her longingly as she made her way up the basement steps.

Max hugged Lucas. "See you guys tomorrow." She looked over at the rest of us after she let go of Lucas. "Looks like the girls are gonna have to save the day once again." Her statement was met with groans from Dustin, Lucas, Will and me. Mike was still too lovestruck to react. Max climbed the stairs and started to close the door behind her, but Mrs. Wheeler stopped it partway to peek her head in.

"Lights out in fifteen minutes, boys" she instructed us before closing the door.

"Ok!" Mike shouted back, having been shaken out of his reverie.

This was the first sleepover the five of us had had in a long time. It was definitely the first since Will and I had gotten together. After everyone had started coupling up the sleepovers became less frequent. Since last fall, Will and I had been having our own sleepovers separate from the rest of the party as the couples spent more time together. We had always been best friends, but we became even closer from the increased amount of time we had spent together away from everyone else, until our experience with the mysterious mansion in the woods two and a half weeks ago finally pushed us to



confess our feelings for each other that we had been holding onto forever.

After moving the table out of the way, we started rolling out our sleeping bags on the basement floor. Even though the pillow fort was still standing, no one was allowed to sleep in it. It was Mike's sacred spot that only El and him were allowed to be inside. Still, he was rolling his sleeping bag out with the rest of us. He never went inside the pillow fort while we were around. While I was looking around trying to find a good spot to lay mine out, hopefully next to Will's I spotted Lucas giving me a dirty look. Our eyes met, which prompted him to speak.

"Are you two planning on sleeping in the same room as us?" Lucas asked, eying both me and Will now.

"Um, yeah," I replied hesitantly.

"I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that." His words stung me. Will looked just as hurt if not more so.

I stiffened. "What's that supposed to mean?" I questioned him, folding my arms in a defensive manner.

"Sleeping with you two in the room is like having a sleepover with girls," Lucas said. "It's awkward." Lucas had been the only one not in the room when Will and I had told everyone we liked each other and were together. We later told Lucas after we defeated the shadow monster inside El's head, and he had been genuinely shocked, unlike everyone else, who had guessed it but weren't one hundred percent certain. Until now, he had shown no signs of disapproval of our relationship or sexualities.

Dustin had finished rolling his sleeping bag out and was watching us silently. Mike stepped toward Lucas, his eyes lit up like a fire blazing a forest.

"What are you talking about? They're still the same Robert and Will," Mike defended us. "Nothing has changed!"

"That's not true, and you know it," Lucas retorted.

"Is this some sort of sick payback for Robert not rescuing you in the campaign?"

"No, this isn't about the stupid campaign! They're gay, Mike. We can't just ignore that and pretend everything is going to be fine and normal.

I clenched my fists. Where was this coming from? He hadn't had an issue with us before.

"Tell him, Dustin," Mike looked hopefully at our curly haired friend wearing his signature red and white baseball cap. Will and I followed Mike's gaze. "Tell him nothing's changed." There was a desperation in his voice, that made my heart break. Even I knew things were different, but I didn't think Lucas would take it so negatively.

Dustin frowned. "Lucas is right." He stepped next to Lucas. The room was now divided into sides. Will and me a bit behind Mike standing opposite to Lucas and Dustin.

"Look, I just think it'd be better for all of us if they sleep upstairs in your room," Lucas advised.

Mike's eyebrows were lowered toward his eyes, his lips narrowed and thinned. I'm not sure I'd ever seen him this angry as he glared at Dustin and Lucas. Not saying anything more to them, Mike turned around to us, his expression softened a bit. "Go up to my room for now. I'll sort this out, I promise."

Will and I nodded. We grabbed our sleeping bags and left the basement in silence, neither of us willing to set eyes on our other friends. After I closed the door to the basement, I heard Mike start to yell. Will was starting to make his way toward the main staircase to go up to the second floor but I yanked him back.

"What are you doing?" Will whispered to me, not wanting to attract attention from Mike's family or the boys downstairs.

"I want to listen," I whispered back. I pressed my face against the door. Sighing, Will did the same.

"What the hell, guys? What's wrong with you?" Mike yelled. The

room was rife with tension.

"High school is coming up. We have to address the Will and Robert situation," Lucas said.

"There is no situation. They're just together."

"Get your head out of your ass, Mike. They're gay. That makes them targets."

"We all get bullied anyway. What's your point?"

"The point is, some of us actually want to have social lives in high school," Lucas replied. "I'm not saying we need to ditch them or break them up, but I think it'd be best for all of us if they could just pretend not to be together while we're in school."

"You know we were all relieved when they finally got together, but we have to be realistic here. This isn't the most tolerant town," Dustin added.

"If people find out about them, that makes us targets too. The last thing we need is more fodder for Troy and James and who knows who else," Lucas continued.

"El's going to be in school with us now. She can deal with anyone that picks on them or us," Mike insisted.

"You know El can't use her powers in school or anywhere else except for life or death situations," Dustin reminded him. "Besides, she can't fight all our battles for us."

"Will and Robert went through hell and back to rescue you from your vision the shadow man trapped you in, and this is how you treat them? By kicking them out of the room and forcing them to pretend to be something they're not?!" Mike snapped.

"If it were Max and I trying to sleep together in here, you'd feel the same way as us," Lucas said.

"That's different! Max is a girl!"

"It's not different, Mike. It's just as awkward for us. We can't do certain things with them anymore. Sleepovers, changing in front of them..."

Mike cut him off. "Are you kidding me? They're still guys like us! I call bull on that logic!"

"This is for the good of the party, Mike. Don't take it so personally. I'm sure they already realize they're going to have to hide their relationship at school anyway," Dustin tried to reassure him.

"Even if they do, it's not up to you! You don't get to make that decision for them!" Mike yelled.

Just then, I heard soft footsteps coming down from upstairs. It was Mrs. Wheeler again, who was now wearing a deep maroon colored robe and white terry cloth slippers. Will and I moved away from the doorway and hid off in a corner behind the stairs to avoid being spotted. The adrenaline rush from the anger I felt listening to my friends argue about our relationship allowed me to act quickly. Mrs. Wheeler opened the door to the basement.

"Michael! What is going on down there?" Mrs. Wheeler called out to her son. Will and I snuck behind her and made our way up the stairs while she was distracted.

Realizing that Lucas and Dustin were beyond persuasion and wanting to avoid explaining their argument to his nosy mother, Mike snatched his sleeping bag and trudged up the steps. "Nothing," he said behind gritted teeth as he pushed past his mother.

"Michael. Michael!" She attempted to get her son's attention to no avail.

He stomped up the stairs and opened the door to his room, finding us laying our sleeping bags on the carpeted floor. He slammed the door behind him, the sound reverberating in my eardrums.

"I can't believe those mouthbreathers!" Mike bellowed, throwing his sleeping bag on the floor roughly.

"We overheard you guys," Will admitted, looking sullen.

Mike's expression softened. "I'm so sorry. You weren't supposed to hear any of that."

"Thanks for sticking up for us, Mike," I said.

"It's not like it did any good," Mike muttered.

Will put his hand on Mike's shoulder. "You tried. That's what counts."

Mike looked defeated. "Let's just get some sleep. I don't want to think about it anymore." He moved briskly away from Will to set up his sleeping bag. Mike's roughness left Will looking dismayed.

Will and I crawled into our sleeping bags. Mine was on the right, Will's was in the middle, and Mike's was on the left closest to the door. Mike shut off his bedroom light before crawling into his sleeping bag. The room was draped in darkness except for the soft moonlight gently pushing through his sheer curtains.

About a half hour or so of silence passed as I lay on my stomach trying to sleep, unsuccessfully. I turned to my left. Mike appeared to be asleep, but I couldn't tell.

"Mike?" I whispered. I got no response. Just the deep breaths of slumber.

"He's asleep," I heard Will whisper. I turned my neck to my right. He was sitting up in his sleeping bag.

"I can't sleep," I admitted, also sitting up.

"Me neither."

I scrunched up closer to him. "I hate it. I hate how they want us to just pretend to not be together after we've pretended to not like each other for forever."

"I know it sucks. But what choice do we have?"

"We could just brave it all... all the bullies. We're stronger together, remember?"

"We could, but it's not fair to them to have to suffer because of us."

"You think they're right?"

"I don't know what's right anymore. Except how I feel about you. I know that's right."

I smiled at his dorky declaration of love.

"I'm mostly annoyed that they kicked us out of the room," Will went on. "That's what hurt."

"Um hmm," I hummed in agreement.

"It's like they don't see us as boys like them anymore."

I shrugged. I didn't want to pretend to fully understand why Lucas and Dustin kicked us out of the basement and give Will the wrong idea.

Will's tone became harsher. "Why are they so worried about us sleeping in the same room as them? Do they think we're going to touch them or something?"

"Will..."

His voice grew louder. "Do they think we have AIDS and they're going to catch it?!"

"Will!" I almost shouted. Thank god Mike was a deep sleeper.

"What?!" He glowered at me. After a couple of seconds, he realized how angry he had gotten and his face softened. Tears started forming around his eyes. "I'm sorry, Robert," his voice cracked.

I hugged him. "They don't think those things. I promise. If they did, they wouldn't have stuck around after they found out."

"Why are they treating us like this then?"

I let him go to look at him. "They're scared, Will. Not of us. But for us. And what it means for them. You heard them through the door."

"Someday, you and I are going to get out of this town and go somewhere where people don't care what we are," Will declared, wiping his eyes.

I grinned. "I'd go anywhere with you, William Byers."

Will stared at me curiously. "You've never called me by my full name before. William."

"I suppose I haven't," I shrugged.

"How come no one calls you Rob? Or Robbie?" Will wondered.

"I don't know. I guess I've just always been fine with plain old Robert."

"That's it. I'm calling you Robbie now. It'll be your pet name," Will teased.

"Nooooo! Please don't!" I whined. "Or I'll have to call you Willy. Can't call you Billy because...you know."

"Ew nooo! That's an awful name... fine. I won't call you Robbie," Will grumbled. Lying down, he snuggled up against me, the thick padded fabric of his sleeping bag brushing up against my body. "Goodnight, Bobby" he yawned.

I groaned as he smirked at me. The contagious nature of yawns led me to also yawn. "Goodnight, Byers."

Meanwhile, downstairs in the basement, Lucas and Dustin crawled into their sleeping bags after shutting the lights. The large room was much sparser than it had just an hour ago.

"Were we too hard on them?" Dustin asked Lucas.

"Mike just overreacted. You know how defensive he gets with those two, especially Will," Lucas answered.

"We didn't have to kick Robert and Will out of the basement, though."

"It's like I tried to explain to Mike. Would you be cool sleeping in the

same room with me and Max? Or Mike and El?"

Dustin shook his head, the mix of moonlight and streetlight coming from the small basement windows giving him just enough backlight to make out his outline.

"Couples and sleepovers don't really mix together," Lucas continued. "They're still our friends, but it's awkward to sleep or change in the same room with them."

"I guess you're right."

"Are you actually agreeing with me again? The Dustin Henderson is agreeing with me twice in one night?"

"Don't cream your panties," Dustin sassed.

Lucas laughed lightly before reverting to more serious thought. "I'm tired of being put in this box: the AV Club weirdos who don't have many friends and play D & D every weekend. I want to be more than that. But that won't ever happen if we're friends with Hawkins High's resident gay couple. Having faced the Upside Down stuff makes us pretty cool I guess, but no one's allowed to know about that."

"I feel that. I'm happy for them. I really am. But they're going to get their asses kicked or worse if everyone finds out. And no one will associate with anyone near them because they don't wanna also get their asses kicked. It's a dog eat dog world out there at Hawkins High. That's what Steve tells me. Someone's always the top dog, and someone's always on bottom."

"This fall is our chance to start over. We can branch out and make new friends. Then if or when the fallout comes for Will and Robert, we don't have to be anywhere near it," Lucas explained.

"You're talking about ditching them and the party?" Dustin asked in an almost accusatory manner.

"I'm talking about a contingency. If we want the party to stay together, and I know I do, no one else can know about them being gay. We have to keep it as secret as the Upside Down stuff," Lucas concluded.



"What about Mike?"

"What about him?"

"I've never seen him this mad, especially not at us," Dustin observed.

"Well, other than when he found out Hopper had been housing El for a year."

"Maybe we should just give him some space for now, I'm sure he knows we're right but just doesn't want to admit it."

"So we're putting the campaign on hold then?" Dustin guessed.

"We're both frozen anyway. They could play without us if they wanted," Lucas reasoned.

"Alright. I'm exhausted. We can talk more tomorrow, your place or mine. Doesn't matter."

"Sure."

"Night, Lucas."

"Night, Dustin."